

Cultivating a thrive-style culture: Unpacking the secrets of workplace flourishing in the South African workplace

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Abstract: This study aims to explore workplace flourishing, specifying its conceptual limits, tracking empirical developments, and highlighting challenges and research opportunities. While flourishing at work is progressively endorsed, it lacks conceptual clarity, valid measures, and context-specific research, especially in South Africa's multicultural, socio-politically complex environment. A systematic literature review was conducted using four databases (Web of Science, SABINET, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar), guided by keywords including: "flourishing," "well-being," "culture," "workplace," "spirituality," and "South Africa." Sources considered eligible included peer-reviewed empirical studies, theoretical papers, and systematic reviews addressing workplace flourishing and associated constructs. Exclusions included duplicates as well as non-English or irrelevant research. This study ensured trustworthiness through double screening, validated critical appraisal tools, multiple-source validation of findings, and backward/forward searching of references. Four key themes emerged: (1) conceptual framework positioning flourishing as a multidimensional construct of emotional, psychological, and social well-being; (2) workplace spirituality as an enabler of meaning, connection, and innovative behaviors; (3) connections among flourishing, engagement, and productivity moderated by organizational culture and leadership; and (4) socio-political, economic, and individual stressors that impede flourishing. The review concludes with recommendations for context-sensitive strategies, policies, and leadership approaches to enhance workplace flourishing, emphasizing the need for culturally grounded frameworks and interventions.

Keywords: *Flourishing, Organizational culture, South Africa, Stressors, Workplace.*

1. Introduction

Flourishing has become a central construct across the areas of psychology, organizational studies, and public health, understood as a multidimensional state of optimal functioning that includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Empirical work increasingly links higher levels of flourishing with greater employee engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction [1, 2]. Yet, despite increasing attention, researchers have not developed universal assessment methods that function across various settings, particularly in diverse South African areas with their political and cultural complexities [3]. South Africa provides a particularly urgent and persuasive example for detailed research. The post-apartheid labor market, with its multicultural workforce as well as socio-economic and political legacies, fosters organizational interactions that may influence how flourishing is experienced and supported [4, 5].

Emerging evidence points to both enablers (for example, workplace spirituality, inclusive leadership, and organizational culture) and powerful impediments (technostress, burnout, structural inequalities) to flourishing in South African workplaces [4–9]. However, current research lacks integration since different studies use separate approaches to define, measure, and analyze flourishing as a phenomenon [8]. This study responds to those gaps. Guided by a systematic literature review approach, it aims to: i)

clarify and delimit the concept of workplace flourishing as applied to the South African employment context; ii) map and critically appraise empirical developments and measurement approaches; iii) identify key enablers and barriers (including organizational, cultural, and socio-political factors) that shape flourishing at work; and iv) highlight methodological, measurement, and policy/practice opportunities for culturally responsive interventions and future research.

To address these aims, we conducted a qualitative systematic literature review across four databases (Web of Science, SABINET, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar) using targeted keywords (e.g., “flourishing,” “well-being,” “culture,” “workplace,” “spirituality,” “South Africa”). Eligibility criteria prioritized peer-reviewed empirical and theoretical work, as well as rigorous systematic reviews focused on workplace flourishing and related constructs. The review’s trustworthiness was strengthened through double screening, validated critical-appraisal tools, multiple-source triangulation, and backward/forward reference searching.

By synthesizing conceptual frameworks, measurement practices, and empirical findings, this review seeks to produce actionable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers aiming to cultivate a “thrive-style” culture in South African workplaces. By doing so, it highlights the necessity for local and relevant measurements, culturally informed strategies, and cross-sectoral attention to systemic and institutional determinants of workplace flourishing.

2. Methodology

This research used qualitative methods, namely a literature review, to explore the theoretical facets of workplace flourishing. This approach was selected because it facilitates the synthesis, critical analysis, and integration of scholarly works, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of evolving concepts [10]. The research applied theoretical frameworks to analyze existing studies, identifying developing trends in workplace flourishing. This method supports openness and repeatability, enabling efficient identification of established concepts within literature.

2.1. Data Collection Process

The researchers started their data collection process by conducting systematic database searches to find multiple reliable sources. The study utilized Web of Science, SABINET, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar as its primary databases, using specific keywords such as “flourishing,” “well-being,” “culture,” “workplace,” “spirituality,” and “South Africa.” The focus was mainly placed on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and high-quality review papers published in English over the past 5 years (2020–2025) to maintain both relevance and contemporary significance. Sources were chosen according to their thematic significance, theoretical contribution, methodological rigor, and temporal scope to uphold academic integrity and ensure the inclusion of relevant literature.

2.2. Thematic Identification

This research utilized inductive document analysis methods to identify themes through multiple iterations [11]. The researchers used coding to pinpoint core concepts, theoretical frameworks, and recurring patterns. The related codes were grouped into broader thematic categories through clustering and comparison. Following this, the analysis examined both commonalities and divergences present in the literature. This thematic synthesis identified major theoretical trends and emerging patterns affecting workplace flourishing.

3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

3.1. Conceptualisation of Flourishing

The phenomenon of *workplace flourishing* in South Africa has become a growing subject of study because of its unique social and cultural context. A surge in research post-2010 aligns with the rise of positive organizational scholarship, such as well-being and flourishing. Seligman [12] PERMA model suggests that flourishing entails feeling and functioning well. The five core elements of this model include positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. In this instance, positive emotions entail experiencing positive feelings like joy, gratitude, optimism, and hope. Engagement refers to the state of being fully absorbed and immersed in activities. Relationships emphasize the importance of strong, supportive, and authentic connections. Meaning occurs when one is involved in activities that feel purposeful and are connected to something larger than oneself. Accomplishment incorporates striving for achievement and achieving goals.

Flourishing can also be linked to several other theoretical models that conceptualize flourishing aspects through research conducted by Keyes [13], Diener et al. [14], Huppert and So [15], and Noble and McGrath [16], as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1.
Four different conceptualisations of flourishing.

Keyes [13]	Diener et al. [14]	Huppert and So [15]	Noble and McGrath [16]
Positive relationships	Positive relationships	Positive relationships	Relationships
Positive affect	Engagement	Engagement	Engagement
Purpose in life	Purpose and meaning	Meaning	Purpose
Self-acceptance	Self-acceptance and Self-esteem	Self-esteem	
Positive affect	Competence	Positive emotion	Positivity
	Optimism	Competence	Outcomes
		Optimism	
Social contribution	Social contribution		
Social integration			
Social actualisation			
Social acceptance			
Social coherence			
Environmental mastery			
Personal growth			
Autonomy			
Life satisfaction			
		Emotional stability	
		Vitality	
		Resilience	Resilience
			Strengths

Within the African context, understanding well-being serves as a necessity due to the continent's multiple social systems, economic structures, and cultural frameworks [17]. Indeed, Kiknadze and Fowers [18] advocate for researchers to develop flourishing models that incorporate culturally specific concepts explaining how people experience flourishing in their natural environments. The authors argue that studying flourishing across different populations requires researchers to examine sociocultural meaning systems, as well as philosophical, religious, and political traditions that influence well-being in various societies. Research by Diener et al. [19] proposed that the consideration of a broader set of well-being variables provides an opportunity to build a more comprehensive understanding of the unique aspects of well-being in the African region. Rothmann [20] a well-known

South African researcher on flourishing, studied the multidimensionality of flourishing in work and organizational contexts and extended the Mental Health Continuum (MHC) measuring instrument of Keyes [13] and Keyes [21] to the work environment.

Rautenbach [22], another South African researcher, developed the Flourishing-at-Work Scale – Short Form (FAWS-SF) in relation to flourishing in the work context. This scale confirmed that flourishing at work is a multidimensional construct that encompasses both *feeling well*, reflected in emotional well-being, and *functioning well*, which includes psychological and social well-being within the work context. In this research, it was emphasized that emotional well-being involves elements such as job satisfaction and positive affect, building on the foundational work of Keyes [13] and Keyes [21] and further supported by the findings of Rojas and Veenhoven [23]. According to Donaldson and Villalobos [24], workplace indicators of positive functioning entail emotions such as contentment, joy, hope, compassion, pride, and gratitude. As for Janse van Rensburg et al. [25] and Rothmann [20], contentment or job satisfaction is defined as a positive emotional state resulting from one's job or job experiences.

Psychological well-being refers to dimensions such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, personal growth, meaning and purpose, and engagement. These are grounded in theoretical contributions by Deci and Ryan [26], Frankl [27], Kahn and Heaphy [28], Ryff [29], Seligman [12], Spreitzer et al. [30], and Steger et al. [31]. Autonomy can be seen as independence, the experience of freedom and choice to carry out activities. Competence alludes to the need to feel viable and to experience agency and dominance in a workplace. Relatedness entails an employee's need to feel socially connected with others and to offer oneself or one's assistance to others [20, 25, 32, 33]. Personal growth is progressive and focuses on how employees grow and develop in their positions over time. Meaning and purpose refer to a worker's emotional decisions regarding their work's importance, motivation, direction, and a sense of fulfillment [34]. Engagement refers to employees' psychological states and practices in their work context [20, 35].

Social well-being, as conceptualised by Keyes [36] includes social acceptance, social contribution, social growth, and social coherence, highlighting the importance of meaningful social interactions and contributions within organizations. Social acceptance refers to being positive towards and accepting diversity in people. Social growth focuses on believing in the potential of others. Social coherence refers to finding society and social life meaningful. Social contribution concerns one's own daily activities as adding value to society and others, whilst social coherence involves experiencing a sense of relatedness, comfort, and support from the community.

Results from research by Janse van Rensburg et al. [25] as well as Redelinghuys et al. [5] confirmed this workplace flourishing three-factor structure of the FAWS-SF.

3.2. Trends in Workplace Flourishing

Recent scholarship reveals that workplace flourishing has become a clear, multifaceted result of work design, social resources, and wider socio-economic systems rather than of individual affect alone [5, 20]. One significant pattern is a change from a restricted focus on personal well-being toward a capabilities and decent-work framework. Flourishing is now being progressively conceptualized in terms of work that honors employee dignity and the prospects to cultivate meaningful capabilities, which place organizational and policy factors at the center of interventions [37]. A second trend is the increased attention to situational and cultural influences on flourishing. Research in South Africa underscores the contribution of cultural intelligence, informal shared expectations, and workplace spirituality in enabling employees to thrive within pluralistic workplaces shaped by historic inequalities, suggesting that leadership and human resource approaches must be culturally sensitive and responsive [3, 9]. A third trend relates to measurement maturity and sectoral nuance. Improved instruments and longitudinal studies have begun to map the frequency, determinants, and outcomes of flourishing across

occupations and over time, showing important differences between sectors and the need for customized initiatives [5, 8, 38].

3.3. *Obstacles to Employee Flourishing*

Despite various advances, numerous deep-rooted obstacles restrict employee flourishing. Burnout and chronic workload pressures persist as key barriers to the capacity to pursue growth, thereby depleting employees' mental and physical resources for flourishing [5]. In the absence of intentional job redesign and demand-resource reallocation, individual resilience efforts might not yield persistent positive effects [8]. A second barrier is poor social and organizational support structures. Where a work environment does not provide a climate of psychological safety and culturally informed leadership, employees are unable to convert their strengths and opportunities into flourishing or thriving outcomes. Conversely, leaders who cultivate culturally informed support and inclusive relationships can meaningfully increase employee flourishing [3, 37]. Organizational spirituality and sense-making practices also appear to strengthen resilience and engagement, yet they are often overlooked in typical organizational offerings [9]. The third impediments consist of organizational culture and structural barriers. These impediments, together with precarious contracts, misaligned reward systems, and toxic norms, restrict the conversion of team resources into steady flourishing. From a capability point of view, without fair pay, a consistent working schedule, explicit pathways for career progression, and workplace interventions that emphasize individual skills, organizational systems will yield minimal results [37].

3.4. *Remedies to Employee Flourishing Obstacles*

Tackling and solving these obstacles requires integrated, multilevel strategies that combine immediate psychosocial supports with sustainable organizational change. To reduce burnout, organizations can design roles and tasks using proven, data-backed practices, adjust workloads, strengthen employee independence, clarify roles, and increase job resources such as development opportunities and supervisory support, all monitored through ongoing measurement [5, 8]. Developing supportive networks requires leadership training that focuses on cultural intelligence, inclusive leadership practices, coordinated mentoring systems, and affordable health care, together with interventions that recognize workplace spirituality and meaning where appropriate [3, 9, 37].

Addressing organizational, cultural, and systemic obstacles means institutionalizing fair labor practices, aligning compensation and contracts with dignity as well as stability. There will also be a need to change how performance is measured, reviewed, and incentivized to reward learning and well-being [37]. It is important to note that the scholarly literature underscores the importance of moving beyond one-off wellness programs. The literature advocates a shift toward sustained, context-sensitive, and follow-up programs that run over time, integrating policy change, line-manager capability building, job design, and community support, while regularly tracking results to guide course corrections [5, 8, 38].

The explored literature indicates that South African workplaces need both individual workplace interventions (i.e., supportive leadership, job resources, and culturally attuned practices) and organizational changes (i.e., decent work, fair policies, and decent reward systems) to establish a “thrive-style” culture. Research indicates that workplace flourishing requires continuous practices that combine different intervention levels while understanding cultural variations [3, 9, 37].

3.5. *Thrive-Like Culture*

Lezar and van der Walt [3] explored the relationship between cultural intelligence, flourishing at work, and thriving at work within the context of South African organizations. Their findings suggest that cultural intelligence not only enhances flourishing in the workplace but also contributes to the cultivation of a “Thrive-Style Culture,” a work environment intentionally designed to support holistic

employee well-being, development, and growth. Studies conducted over two decades of research have proven that cultural intelligence enables people to succeed when working in various cultural environments [39].

This is particularly relevant in South Africa, a nation known for its rich cultural diversity and often referred to as the "Rainbow Nation." In this multicultural environment, with its diverse languages and social customs, cultural intelligence is an essential competence for people to communicate effectively with each other. Research indicates that cultural intelligence holds greater importance beyond the business environment. Various studies have proved its importance for healthcare facilities, educational organizations, and occupational therapy practices. For example, Barnacle et al. [40] intimate that healthcare providers need cultural and linguistic competence to deliver successful patient care. Their study showed that healthcare students who took isiXhosa practical courses became better at patient communication, which led to higher patient satisfaction. Similarly, Matthews and Van Wyk [41] as well as Casoojee [42] suggest that training of healthcare professionals should incorporate community insights, patient experiences, and cultural backgrounds in both curriculum development and healthcare initiatives. This is supported by Abrahams et al. [43], who argue for the requirement to change speech-language therapy methods from Western-based approaches to models that match South African cultural requirements. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that cultural intelligence development stands as a fundamental requirement for boosting workplace happiness and career success in multicultural settings like South Africa.

South African society faces multiple social elements that negatively affect the overall national wellness of the country. Findings from the Global Flourishing Study [44] showed encouraging outcomes in areas such as psychological well-being (peace) and reduced psychological distress (suffering). However, a study by Cowden et al. [45] showed that South Africans experienced diminished levels of life satisfaction, meaning, job satisfaction, trust, and experiences of unequal treatment, emphasizing continuous social challenges. In the workplace setting, social support enables workers to develop relationships through shared concerns and help-seeking opportunities, which results in respectful and caring professional bonds. Research consistently shows that social support in the workplace leads to better health outcomes and improved well-being, which creates a more positive work environment. Additionally, when employers engage in fair remuneration, participatory decision-making, and active support of employees' social integration, they add to fair work standards as required by the International Labour Organization [46]. In doing so, organizations help achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, these organizations support Goals 3 and 8, which focus on health, well-being, decent work, and economic growth [47].

3.6. Spirituality at Work

Research has shown that spirituality plays a vital role in fostering flourishing across global settings. However, studies exploring multidimensional well-being among nationally representative samples of South Africans have seldom incorporated spirituality-related indicators within the workplace setting [7, 45].

The growing interest in spirituality at work in recent years can be attributed to its capacity to create a more positive and psychologically supportive work environment [9]. Workplace spirituality is reflected in an organizational culture of connectedness based on trust, honesty, care, respect, loyalty, appreciation, and innovation [48].

According to Widodo and Suryosukmono [49], workplace spirituality is characterized as meaningful work, purpose, community, and self-transcendence. This implies that individuals can engage with and experience spirituality through various mechanisms embedded within the organizational context. These dimensions highlight that spirituality can manifest at the individual, group, or organizational level. Similarly, Zhang [50] identifies three fundamental workplace spirituality elements,

which include meaningful work, a sense of community, and value alignment to support. This supports the concept that workplace spirituality exists in multiple dimensions. Research by Pawar [51] shows that meaningful work and workplace community involvement lead to better emotional, psychological, and social well-being for employees.

With regard to emotional aspects, research shows that spirituality creates beneficial effects on employee emotional well-being, reduces negative emotions, and enhances job satisfaction [2, 9, 50-52]. One possible explanation for this is that employees who experience a strong alignment between their personal values and those of their organization are more likely to perceive their workplace as a meaningful and supportive environment. Organizations that demonstrate care for both the physical and spiritual health of their employees create stronger emotional bonds with their workforce. As Zhang [50] explains, individuals often take pride in working for organizations that demonstrate ethical consciousness, show compassion for employees and the underprivileged, and operate with integrity. This, in turn, contributes to greater emotional satisfaction and a more fulfilling work experience.

In the context of spirituality and psychological well-being, research studies demonstrate that spiritual values in the workplace create positive effects on both psychological health and spiritual development of employees. Research by Chen et al. [53] demonstrates that workplace spirituality creates psychological safety, which leads employees to become more proactive in their work activities. Fajar et al. [6] found that employees who experience spiritual values in their organizational culture develop stronger work connections and higher intrinsic motivation, which leads to better organizational results. The research by Hunsaker and Ding [2] revealed that spirituality directly affects employee attitudes toward their work, including their involvement in the job, their commitment to the organization, and their overall performance. A systematic literature review by Koburtay et al. [54] analyzed the actual effects of workplace spirituality on employee mental health. They discovered six new psychological indicators of mental health well-being, which include self-esteem, a sense of significance, positive emotions, voluntary simplicity, self-identity, as well as physical and mental health. Consequently, the research confirms that workplace spirituality functions as a vital element for developing complete psychological wellness and creating an engaged workforce with higher motivation and satisfaction levels.

In relation to spirituality and social well-being, research highlights the important role spirituality plays in fostering social connection and support within organizational settings. Hassan et al. [55] found that spiritually inclined individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that cultivate social support and interpersonal connection, thereby fulfilling key social needs. Similarly, Hunsaker and Ding [2] demonstrated that workplace spirituality dimensions develop positive workplace relationships when organizations support employee spiritual needs. Rocha and Pinheiro [56] explain that spirituality functions as a uniting element, enabling people to discover their life purpose and connect with others across different generations. The research of Roth [57] shows that people who express higher spiritual levels tend to perform more prosocial actions, which supports the idea that spirituality enhances social well-being.

The Spillover Theory Wilensky [58] and Fredrickson [59] broaden-and-build theory of emotional resources provides theoretical support for understanding how workplace spirituality affects employee innovation through employee flourishing as a mediator. The state of flourishing represents a peak condition of psychological, emotional, and social wellness [14], which research shows leads to better creativity and innovative idea generation [2, 60, 61]. Research indicates that workplace spirituality leads to better employee well-being, which subsequently results in improved innovative work behaviors [2]. This occurs as spiritually enriched work environments promote positive emotional states and adaptive responses to workplace challenges, thereby broadening employees' psychosocial resources. These resources are then reciprocated to the organization in the form of innovation, such as creative ideas, novel solutions, and process improvements [2, 54, 59, 60].

Similarly, a systematic review by Koburtay et al. [54] demonstrates that spiritual practices at work create positive effects on employee well-being through increased engagement, job satisfaction, and stronger workplace connection. Their review presents a holistic conceptualization of workplace spirituality, characterized by values such as humanism, benevolence, integrity, justice, respect, trust, compassion, community, alignment of values, and meaningful work. These basic elements create conditions that support innovative work behaviors through positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose, and personal growth, which lead to healthier workplace dynamics.

The content of the foregoing sections implies that leaders need to create an environment of positive support that welcomes diverse spiritual beliefs through adaptable organizational systems [6, 62, 63]. Organizations that focus on employees' spiritual needs create better job satisfaction, commitment, and involvement, while simultaneously boosting performance and innovation [2, 64].

3.7. *Workplace Culture*

The South African context requires understanding local cultural aspects of well-being through indigenous knowledge systems and Afrocentric perspectives, which view people as connected to their environment [65]. The post-COVID-19 period has led employees to seek workplaces that promote complete wellness, which has become a vital strategic focus since research shows that employee flourishing directly affects employees' mental health [66].

To foster such flourishing, organizations should implement supportive initiatives that promote mutual respect and enable person-organization fit through meaningful and engaging work [67-70]. These practices need to use employees' natural drive for purposeful work and interpersonal bonds to build their organizational pride and identification [2, 60, 71].

Central to this process is the role of leadership. Leadership plays a crucial part in developing and maintaining an organizational culture that supports strategic goals [72]. A positive organizational culture makes a company stand out from competitors [73], while drawing in skilled workers who want to develop their skills in a supportive environment [6, 74].

Moreover, cultivating a culture that values innovation allows leaders to drive transformative change within organizational systems [75]. Organizations that foster creative environments lead to better employee results, whilst stimulating original solutions and concepts [69, 76, 77]. The Integrative Model of Organizational Performance shows that performance results from individual and group-level innovative actions, which both stem from and strengthen organizational culture [78]. The model demonstrates how behaviors interact with cultural elements to produce organizational results. The maintenance of such a culture requires continuous strategic adjustments to find equilibrium between personal requirements and environmental elements. The establishment of this equilibrium through institutional practices leads to better employee retention and performance results [5].

It should finally be emphasized that the cultural elements for workplace success include trust and psychological safety. These cultural elements allow staff members to express their concerns and receive support while building professional relationships. Managers need to create cross-cultural awareness and adapt their practices to accommodate different cultural backgrounds, which results in better diversity and inclusion outcomes. The development of inclusive training programs, which provide social support and digital resilience education, will strengthen these initiatives [8]. When employees feel connected to their organizational culture, they exhibit greater intrinsic motivation and engagement, ultimately boosting performance [6].

3.8. *Implications and Outcomes of Flourishing*

Research has shown that employees who flourish are not only more productive and engaged but also contribute significantly to positive workplace dynamics. Flourishing individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of job engagement, characterized by vigor, dedication, absorption, and enthusiasm [8, 79].

They also demonstrate a stronger commitment, improved job performance, and willingly engage in discretionary behaviors such as knowledge sharing [80, 81].

In addition to performance-related outcomes, flourishing is positively associated with resilience factors such as coping skills, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction [1]. The workplace culture of growth and development emerges when employees experience complete personal and professional advancement through vitality, continuous learning, and meaningful progress [3]. The improved well-being of these employees enables them to perform their core duties better while delivering innovative solutions with enhanced efficiency [5].

The combination of personal growth and happiness at work emerges when employees discover meaning in their tasks and build strong relationships with their colleagues. The positive emotional state creates a peaceful workplace atmosphere, which enhances the bonds between team members [82]. The positive relationship between flourishing and work performance exists because flourishing workers avoid absenteeism and tardiness and maintain their work effort at high levels. The research by Mohamad Ibrahim et al. [83] shows that employees with high well-being levels avoid negative work behaviors, which create a stable and productive work environment.

Flourishing at work influences employees' power distance orientation. *Power distance orientation* refers to employees' willingness to accept different levels of authority between superiors and subordinates in organizational structures. The research by Giolito et al. [84] shows that flourishing employees tend to have a lower power distance orientation because they want workplaces to be based on equal relationships and teamwork. Thus, flourishing workers tend to stay in their current roles longer than those who are not. In this regard, Naim and Ozyilmaz [85] demonstrate that flourishing employees show decreased intentions to leave their positions. The connection between job satisfaction and employee retention and organizational commitment becomes stronger due to job satisfaction, a fundamental element of flourishing [25, 38].

Moreover, organizational commitment reaches its peak when employees experience flourishing. Flourishing shows their deep emotional bond with their workplace, a bond that develops a strong organizational commitment. Such employees become deeply invested in their company's values and objectives. This commitment level of flourishing employees results in a stable and motivated workforce [86]. There is a need to further indicate that workplace-flourishing employees demonstrate organizational citizenship behaviors by exceeding their regular job duties [5, 72]. The workplace also benefits from extra-role behaviors, which include colleague assistance, initiative suggestions, and active participation in organizational projects [87].

Overall, the explored literature confirms that an integrated cross-level framework, macro-level socio-economic inequities, institutional architecture, and culture determine short-term resource availability and demands, personal experiences of stress, and meaning that actually shape flourishing outcomes [5, 8, 37]. Major tensions, however, persist. Firstly, there is still a persistent imbalance between system-wide reform efforts and practical organizational interventions. Scholars call for a concurrent focus on both, but evidence-based studies that test interventions across multiple levels in the South African context are rare [8]. Secondly, measurement and prevalence studies [5, 38] draw attention to sectoral variability, showing a need for context-sensitive measures that capture cultural, spiritual, and dimension-related aspects of capability [3, 9].

The contents of the explored literature call for prioritization of decent-work principles, culturally competent leadership, and integrated support (mental health services, job redesign, pathways for development), instead of fragmented resilience training. For researchers, priorities include long-term, multitiered evaluations of interventions that address systemic inequalities and organizational design, and the development of evaluation instruments that mirror South Africa's cultural and spiritual diversity. Only by connecting policy or system drivers with individual outcomes, and by testing

coordinated organizational policies, can the field shift from diagnosing obstacles to implementing solutions that foster genuine workplace flourishing.

4. Findings Derived from the Literature

This study utilized a literature review methodology aimed at examining workplace flourishing, delineating its conceptual boundaries, tracing empirical advancements, and underscoring obstacles and research prospects in South Africa. Four primary themes emerged from the studied literature. These themes are summarized and presented in the subsequent sections.

4.1. Theme 1: Conceptual Framework of Flourishing

Although the original concept of flourishing was rooted in individual personal well-being, its principles are increasingly being applied to organizational contexts. This theme deliberates the definition and measurement of flourishing, factors that influence flourishing, and the cultural context of workplace flourishing.

4.1.1. Sub-theme: Definition and Measurement of Flourishing

Seligman [12] PERMA model for flourishing suggests that flourishing involves feeling and functioning well. A study by Rothmann [20] adapted flourishing aspects to work and organizational contexts. His research builds on flourishing's multidimensionality, which includes dimensions of emotional well-being (feeling well), psychological well-being, and social well-being (functioning well). Without an established measure of flourishing (one that accounts for individual differences and the modern conceptualization of well-being as a complex state), the ability to evaluate individual flourishing status and assess intervention efficacy is limited [1]. Thus, valid measurements of flourishing, such as those of Rautenbach [22], are important to provide antecedents for flourishing and well-being research, to capture the essence of flourishing. Empirical evidence by Janse van Rensburg et al. [25] confirms Rothmann's [20] multi-faceted conceptualization of flourishing at work, identifying emotional, psychological, and social well-being as three central, interconnected components for the measurement of flourishing at work. This three-factor model is consistent with other frameworks, such as Keyes [13], Diener et al. [14], Huppert and So [15], and Noble and McGrath [16], emphasising the significance of holistic flourishing in organisational environments. Studies by Redelinghuys et al. [5] suggest that organizations should regularly refine their strategic frameworks to maintain a healthy balance between individual and environmental characteristics. This will provide the basis for a favorable work environment. When such a flourishing environment is institutionalized, talent retention and performance should follow. Research also emphasizes the significance of research across disciplines in the context of well-being and organizational settings [20] to achieve a more comprehensive view on flourishing at work.

4.1.2. Sub-theme: Influencing Factors of Flourishing at Work

The notions of emotional well-being in the work context involve job satisfaction and positive affect. Psychological well-being refers to dimensions such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, personal growth, meaning and purpose, and engagement. Social well-being includes social acceptance, social contribution, social growth, and social coherence [20]. Flourishing individuals are creative, experience less helplessness, and have more favorable emotions, leading to more positive outcomes in the work context. This, in turn, provides collective benefits for both themselves and their organization. To nurture workplace flourishing, organizations should actively advocate for mental health, promote balance, and build nurturing environments where employees feel appreciated and empowered.

4.1.3. Sub-theme: Cultural Context of Flourishing

A study by Lezar and van der Walt [3] emphasizes cultural intelligence as a necessary factor in encouraging employee mental health and well-being within organizations. Given South Africa's multicultural context, cultural intelligence serves as a key enabler for fostering workplace inclusivity where both flourishing and thriving may take place simultaneously. By enhancing cultural intelligence, organizations can reinforce both their internal effectiveness and external competitiveness. A culture of social support in the workplace fosters a sense of connection among employees. Such an environment aligns with the principles of decent work by promoting fairness, inclusion, and social integration. When employers prioritize these elements, they actively contribute to a more supportive and thriving workplace [47].

4.2. Theme 2: Workplace Spirituality and Flourishing

Workplace spirituality is increasingly recognized as a key element of holistic well-being, offering a framework that fosters individual flourishing while promoting a more ethical, meaningful, and supportive organizational culture.

4.2.1. Sub-Theme: Relationship between Spirituality and Well-Being

Research revealed that spirituality, both within the workplace and at an individual level, significantly contributes to employee well-being. Workplace spirituality entails a set of values and principles that promote connectedness, meaning, and purpose among members of a work unit, grounded in shared spiritual values [9].

Specifically, empirical studies suggest that spirituality favorably affects emotional well-being, as spiritually inclined employees are more likely to feel increased positive emotions, reduced negative emotions, and greater job satisfaction compared to their less spiritual counterparts [9]. Various studies have found that psychological well-being is affected by spirituality and, as a result, influences facets such as psychological safety, a sense of purpose, self-determination, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging Fajar et al. [6], Chen et al. [53], and Srivastava and Gupta [88]. Hassan et al. [55] found that individuals with higher levels of spirituality were more prone to have their social needs fulfilled, thus experiencing social well-being. The foregoing studies indicate that workplace spirituality can be recognized as a foundational factor in shaping employee well-being in areas of emotional, psychological, and social aspects.

4.2.2. Sub-Theme: Spirituality and Innovative Work Behaviours

Research by Hunsaker and Ding [2] demonstrates that workplace spirituality is instrumental in unleashing employees' innovative behavior. Spiritually supportive workplaces promote positive flourishing states, assisting employees in responding effectively to challenges and channeling their well-being into novel solutions and process improvements. A systematic review by Koburtay et al. [54] highlights the fact that positive effects of spiritual practices foster innovative work behaviors such as positive relations, a sense of purpose, environmental mastery, conditions that support autonomy, growth, and innovation. To improve performance, employee satisfaction, and organizational commitment, leaders must encourage spiritual diversity and provide adaptable structures that address employees' spiritual needs.

This underscores the importance of integrating spirituality into organizational culture as a strategic approach to enhancing both individual and collective performance.

4.2.3. Sub-Theme: Implementation of Spiritual Practices

Organizations are advised to cultivate values that are in harmony with one another to create a climate conducive to workplace spirituality.

Workplace spirituality fosters connection, purpose, and broader community engagement, ultimately promoting social good [51, 56, 89, 90]. According to research by Tigedi et al. [9], spirituality contributes towards employee well-being by fostering satisfaction, happiness, and meaning at work.

Leaders play a vital role in shaping workplaces where people feel included, valued, and free to express their spiritual beliefs [62, 63]. Hunsaker and Ding [2] show that recognizing employees' spiritual needs and building supportive relationships fosters flourishing and reduces emotional strain. To embed spirituality, organizations should train staff, encourage reflective practices and policies, supply facilities, and integrate spiritual support and development into human resource training [54], thereby shaping a culture that sustains well-being.

The evidence presented affirms that workplace spirituality is a critical enabler of employee flourishing, influencing emotional, psychological, and social well-being. By fostering a sense of purpose, connection, and shared values, spirituality supports not only individual wellness but also innovative and adaptive work behaviors. Leadership commitment to spiritual inclusion and supportive structures is crucial in embedding these values into organizational culture. By thoughtfully introducing workplace spirituality through training, inclusive policies, and supportive practices, organizations can create meaningful work experiences.

4.3. Theme 3: Employee Engagement and Productivity

4.3.1. Sub-theme Link between Flourishing and Engagement

Some literature highlights the correlation between employee flourishing and engagement, suggesting that a flourishing environment boosts employee participation and commitment. Both work engagement and flourishing at work emphasize positive mental states and involvement in work activities. Both constructs emphasize the positive, fulfilling experiences employees can have in their jobs [8].

Flourishing, as operationalised by Diener et al. [14], represents an advanced and holistic measure of an individual's social-psychological prosperity. It captures a comprehensive framework that includes dimensions such as being engaged, interested, and capable in one's work, which are recognized as components of flourishing [14, 19], thereby reinforcing its relevance within organizational and occupational settings.

Rothmann [20] conceptualizes employee flourishing as a multifaceted construct encompassing both the nature and realization of optimal functioning in the workplace. His research includes key dimensions of psychological well-being, such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, continuous learning, meaning and purpose, and engagement. The importance of engagement as a key element of flourishing is further supported by subsequent empirical studies [5, 25], which highlight it as an antecedent and essential component of the flourishing experience.

4.3.2. Sub-theme: Influence of Organisational Culture

Organizational culture serves as a pivotal factor in fostering flourishing among employees. Post-COVID-19, employee flourishing has become a strategic imperative, closely tied to performance and retention [5]. To cultivate flourishing, organizations are encouraged to promote person-organization fit, mutual respect, and meaningful work factors that enhance motivation [68].

Leadership plays a central role in embedding these values into organizational culture and enabling ongoing personal and professional growth [72]. By shaping such a culture, leaders also become key drivers of fostering innovation, encouraging individual and group creativity, which in turn enhances organizational performance [2, 6].

Finally, the theme underscores the importance of psychological safety, trust, and competence in creating inclusive, supportive work environments [8]. These cultural elements not only enhance social

connection and resilience but also contribute to higher employee engagement and improved organizational outcomes.

4.3.3. Sub-theme: Productivity Outcomes of Flourishing

Flourishing at work leads to a range of positive outcomes, enhancing not only individual workplace productivity but also organizational effectiveness and cohesion.

With regard to individual outcomes, research has shown that flourishing has a significant influence on increased job engagement, commitment, job performance, knowledge sharing, resilience, job satisfaction, development and growth, positive work relationships, lower levels of withdrawal behavior, power distance orientation, and turnover intentions [1, 3, 8, 79-85].

Flourishing employees tend to exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. They also display a deep sense of emotional loyalty and a strong alignment with their organization's values and goals [86]. In addition, they are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors, which promote workplace cooperation and contribute positively to overall organizational functioning [5, 72, 87]. This proactive and discretionary behavior fosters a more productive and efficient workplace culture.

This analysis demonstrates how employee flourishing creates multiple effects on organizational settings. It not only enhances individual engagement but also represents employees' complete psychological and social wellness. Organizational culture is instrumental in enabling flourishing, primarily through leadership that champions psychological safety, innovation, and value-based environments. The post-COVID-19 period demands that organizations establish flourishing cultures since this approach is essential for achieving better performance, maintaining employee motivation, and workforce stability. This research shows that flourishing employees generate higher organizational productivity because they demonstrate stronger team-oriented behaviors, which enhance both team unity and operational performance.

4.4. Theme 4: Challenges and Barriers to Flourishing

The explored literature revealed that multiple workplace challenges exist in South Africa's workplaces. It is these challenges that create barriers to employee flourishing. This theme delves into the socio-political and economic challenges that impact workplace dynamics, individual employee stressors, factors that detract from employees' well-being, as well as the essential need for robust organizational support structures to promote flourishing.

4.4.1. Sub-Theme Socio-Political and Economic Challenges

Flourishing in the workplace cannot be separated from the broader socio-political and economic realities by which South African organizations operate. Peethambaran and Naim [8] argue that the enduring impacts of post-colonial structures and persistent economic inequalities pose challenges to creating environments in which employees can truly flourish.

These external elements manifest as restricted resource availability, unbalanced career progression opportunities, and institutional discrimination that impact specific employee groups. According to Harunavamwe and Ward [4], such factors, manifesting as labor relation disputes, political instability, and governance issues, render the work environment unpredictable. This unpredictability breeds anxiety and reduces employee engagement, thereby undermining organizational efforts to cultivate a thriving culture. Therefore, to build a workplace environment that supports employee health and flourishing, organizations need to tackle these social, political, and economic challenges.

4.4.2. Sub-Theme: Individual Employee Stressors

Together with the broader socio-political and economic challenges, individual employee stressors were identified as major obstacles to workplace flourishing. Harunavamwe and Ward [4] pinpoint

issues such as technostress and burnout as common afflictions experienced by employees in modern work settings. Technostress, characterized by the stress induced by the overreliance on technology and constant connectivity, can lead to feelings of overwhelm and disengagement. This resonates with the findings of Redelinguys et al. [5] research. In their research, the authors found that burnout caused by chronic workplace stress leads to severe emotional exhaustion, detachment, and diminished personal accomplishment, eventually suffocating employee potential.

These individual stressors can lead to a vicious cycle in which employees become less engaged, less productive, and less likely to contribute positively to their organizations. The acknowledgment of these stressors is vital for developing targeted interventions that can promote well-being and flourishing, recognizing that a supportive work environment that addresses individual needs is crucial for overcoming these barriers.

4.4.3. Sub-Theme: Need for Organisational Support Structures

To nurture a context supportive of flourishing, it is vital for organizations to roll out support structures. Ragadu and Rothmann [37] advocate for organizations to provide tailored support systems addressing specific employee challenges, such as access to mental health resources, flexible work arrangements, and initiatives that promote work-life balance. These elements are essential in creating a culture that not only acknowledges but actively works to alleviate the challenges faced by employees. Additionally, Redelinguys et al. [5] indicate that organizational dedication to employee well-being through structured support helps mitigate the effects of burnout and improve overall job satisfaction, thus resulting in expanded engagement and productivity. These organizational frameworks can enable a sense of belonging, promote open communication, and eventually create a thriving workplace where employees feel valued and empowered.

From the above-mentioned section, the challenges of flourishing in the South African workplace are multidimensional, incorporating socio-political and economic factors, individual stressors, and the need for supportive systems within organizations. Addressing these elements requires a nuanced understanding of the contextual realities influencing employee experience and the implementation of targeted strategies aimed at fostering a thrive-style culture. By recognizing and actively combating these challenges, organizations can pave the way for improved employee well-being, engagement, and overall workplace flourishing, which are pivotal for long-term success in the dynamic South African environment.

The findings, as presented in the preceding sections, confirm that flourishing at work is a multi-faceted organizational concept that encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Initially, it was conceptualized in terms of individual well-being. However, the concept is now re-examined to include workplace elements such as job satisfaction, positive affect, autonomy, competence, relatedness, personal growth, meaning, purpose, and engagement, along with social acceptance, contribution, growth, and coherence. Different studies now underscore robust evidence-based measurements that consider individual differences. The studies further caution against merging flourishing with linked concepts such as happiness or life satisfaction. The findings have confirmed that flourishing employees are more creative, feel less helpless, and have more positive feelings, which is an advantage to both employees and organizations. Indeed, the literature has confirmed that to enhance employee flourishing, organizations have adopted levers like mental health promotion, work-life balance, empowerment, and meaningful employee participation. Additionally, to enhance flourishing in diverse workplaces, such as in South Africa, cultural intelligence and social support are critical for inclusive, decent work.

5. Recommendations

Organizations should make workplace flourishing a key strategic objective by integrating explicit, quantifiable wellness objectives into their main strategy, human resource practices, and performance frameworks. This requires harmonizing policies on pay, career progression, workload, and flexible working with a commitment to decent work so that institutional obstacles to flourishing are proactively reduced, as opposed to treating them as secondary issues. Senior leaders must openly advocate for these commitments and ensure that resources are earmarked for long-term implementation rather than one-off pilots. This will enable flourishing initiatives to move from pilots to formal adoption.

Leadership development should give precedence to cultural intelligence, psychological safety, and inclusive, values-based practice. This will make it possible for managers to nurture environments where workers feel valued, linked to each other, and make substantive contributions. Training for leaders must extend past technical competencies to include reflective practices, coaching, and conflict-sensitive communication that recognize South Africa's cultural diversity and socio-historical contexts. By demonstrating openness and a commitment to learning, leaders can nurture environments that reward innovation, knowledge sharing, and collective problem solving.

It is also recommended that organizations adopt multifaceted instruments of flourishing that capture emotional, psychological, and social domains, and these tools must be customized and tested across all South African languages and work contexts. Measurement should incorporate self-report scales with objective indicators such as turnover, absenteeism, productivity, and organizational citizenship behaviors. It is important that data, as opposed to supervision enforcements, should guide decisions regarding ongoing refinements or improvements. Long-term monitoring and frequent brief surveys should be implemented to allow organizations to assess change over time, detect unanticipated outcomes, and adjust flourishing programs based on empirical evidence.

Workplace spirituality can serve as a strong catalyst for meaning, connection, and innovative behavior when implemented respectfully. It is therefore recommended that employers establish voluntary programs for reflection and community development. Furthermore, managers can be trained to handle diverse spiritual beliefs and make values-based discussions part of regular organizational activities, without forcing employees to participate in sectarian practices. The authors envisage that the documentation and implementation of spiritually informed initiative performance will not only enhance well-being benefits but will also promote balanced workplace adoption that protects personal freedom and diversity.

There is a need for the implementation of practical support systems. Such systems should focus on stress reduction for individuals by addressing employee mental health issues, burnout, heavy workloads, and flexible work arrangements. It is envisaged that this will address technostress and work-life conflict. It is important that the initiatives are customized to cater to groups most affected by structural inequalities to ensure equity. A combination of peer networks, mentoring programs, and psychologically informed line-management practices will create social unity while providing employees with daily protection against ongoing workplace stress. It is also important that all flourishing initiatives operate under governance systems that are ethical. Organizations need to protect employee data privacy through informed consent while preventing discrimination in their measurement and intervention approaches. Organizations must also monitor the adverse effects of flourishing initiatives in addition to involving staff members in the initiatives' design and development. Such a move will enhance both acceptance and usage rates. Additionally, organizations should form alliances with public agencies, sector bodies, and other organizations to tackle broad socio-economic factors, which single employers cannot handle independently, thus creating an environment that supports lasting flourishing development.

6. Proposal for Future Research

Future research needs to develop a comprehensive evidence base for workplace flourishing in South Africa. This should be done through studies that combine multiple research approaches. It is important that such studies measure outcomes and establish cause-and-effect relationships among the different constructs of flourishing, explain processes, and translate findings into practical applications. The first step requires psychometric validation of flourishing tools to guarantee their validity, reliability, and measurement consistency across South Africa's diverse linguistic, cultural, and occupational settings. It is vital that future researchers reinterpret and contextualize existing instruments to suit the South African workplace. The development of research studies that follow employees for longer terms, such as 12 to 36 months, is recommended. Such studies will establish causal relationships between flourishing, engagement, performance, and health outcomes. This will assist researchers in understanding how interventions work, what factors influence their success, and what obstacles prevent large-scale implementation. Realistic evaluations and mixed-methods case studies are also recommended to investigate how flourishing interventions work within various organizational settings and affect employees who belong to different identity groups in order to address South African equity and inclusion priorities.

Research needs to expand its focus from individual and team performance to study organizational and social results. The combination of self-report data with actual business and social performance indicators, such as employee turnover, absenteeism, productivity, and innovation metrics, will enhance the evidence supporting business and social value creation. Senior leaders and policymakers require economic impact data from return-on-investment analyses and costing studies to support their decisions about sustaining investments in flourishing. The combination of organizational data with regional socio-economic indicators through multilevel modelling will enable researchers to understand how external factors like labor market conditions and political instability affect workplace interventions.

Finally, research methods must maintain absolute methodological integrity through pre-registration, proper sample sizes, and complete reporting, which follow established guidelines to enhance credibility. Research involving spirituality and mental health support requires strict ethical measures to protect participant consent and privacy while maintaining voluntary participation. Research priorities and intervention design should receive guidance from employees, unions, and community stakeholder participation through co-design processes to achieve both relevance and implementation success. The development of strong actionable knowledge for South African workplaces depends on researchers who implement an integrated research plan that combines measurement approaches with longitudinal and experimental designs, mixed methods, economic evaluation, and participatory research methods.

7. Conclusion

This study synthesized literature on workplace flourishing, focusing on its conceptual limits, tracking empirical developments, exploring challenges, and research opportunities to unpack the secrets of workplace flourishing in the South African workplace. It emerged that workplace flourishing is a multifaceted and changing phenomenon that entails emotional, psychological, and social well-being. When viewed and evaluated comprehensively, flourishing could be a powerful link for connecting personal well-being with organizational outcomes such as engagement, innovation, and productivity. The South African context, with its abundant cultural diversity, persistent socio-economic inequalities, and legacy of the past, enhances potential benefits for improving flourishing.

Workplace spirituality surfaced as a key facilitator of purpose, connection, and creative work when implemented through methods that honor diversity and individual autonomy. Similarly, leadership and organizational culture were discovered as instrumental in ensuring a flourishing culture. This means that those who foster psychological safety and who are cross-culturally savvy nurture conditions under

which flourishing can take root. In contrast, macro-level stressors, technostress, and burnout pose major obstacles that impede the impact of otherwise well-meaning programs. These trends emphasize the assertion that flourishing cannot be attained through isolated programs alone but requires harmonized and continuous attention to policy, culture, measurement, and employee support.

It is important to note that the findings of this study confirmed that evidence, especially regarding localized measurement of flourishing, causal evaluations of interventions, and long-term outcomes in South African workplaces, is still patchy. This has confirmed the need for rigorous, locally rooted research and intersectoral collaboration to address both organizational levers and the broader socio-economic conditions affecting workers. In the final analysis, making flourishing a priority is not only an ethical necessity for organizational life but is also a strategic investment. When organizations commit to comprehensive, locally adapted approaches, they stand to reap both human and business benefits that are mutually reinforcing and enduring.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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